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SB1054

I am in support of Bill 1054, however additional support is needed to meet the needs of our students with Dyslexia. Specifically, if we don't mandate universal screening tools our students will continued to go unidentified and we need teachers who are trained to teach our students with Dyslexia.

I have always been told the more you read to your child the better readers they will become. So I started reading to my son Luca in the womb and continued after his birth to read to my son every day.

However, this principle did not create a reader. My son had a number of red flags that I should have seen. At age four, he didn't draw or write letters, his name or pictures. His preschool report card said his drawings (scribbles) were not legible. At five, he said his hands weren't made for writing. At age six, he had trouble printing his name Luca and remembering his birthday August 27. At age 7, he said he couldn't read the words in the books at school. He just looks at the pictures during independent reading time. At this point, after constant inquiring, I found out he was reading at a Kindergarten level.

When speaking with the teachers in first grade we were told "Luca was on the radar." In second grade during a November conference we were told "at least he is not the lowest reader in the class." At no point during this educational process was anything ever suggested to us. We were constantly told he was a role model to other students, he was an excellent leader, and had great communication skills. We had to ask for extra help in reading. When his reading level was not changing I asked for Luca to be tested. Luca then had an IEP for a decoding disability. Then in second grade I requested an independent evaluation from a neuropsychologist.

Early identification would of changed the way my son now sees himself. He would have believed that he is strong and competent as a student as he is a swimmer. Luca recently won first play in the divisional championships for swimming in a relay age eight and under. He has strength and determination.

However, had his public preschool teacher who has a master's in special education, been trained in early identification of Dyslexia Luca would have been a different student today. I know now that it only takes one student to see it. My five year old daughter, Maria, has the classic signs of Dyslexia also.

If we can change her course of public education is still undetermined. As parents, we can't change the way the school sees Dyslexia without support of the Bill 1054. Educators must be informed, educated, and implement evidence based interventions. Maria has the confidence of every new learner and explorer of a five year old.

The Enfield School System is not trained with evidence based instructions for students with Dyslexia. It's so important not lose our children in the reading gap. Luca has difficulty reading the riddle on a popsicle stick at age eight and a half. His friends are reading Harry Potter. This makes a difference educationally and psychologically in the life of an eight and a half year old. Luca also cannot read things that are important to him outside of the classroom; he could not read the field instructions at baseball when the coach posted them in the dugout. It really does affect his self-confidence. This is because he was not identified early and then has not gotten evidence based instruction from a certified teacher of Dyslexia.

Professional development days would also make a difference in the day in the life of a Dyslexic student. Luca recently had an aversion to Thursdays at school. He would begin crying on Wednesdays that the work was too much and too hard. We tried to get more details but he would hit himself in the head and cry harder. We took Luca to a therapist for four weeks without an answer. It wasn't until I explained the situation to the principal that she called the music teacher into her office. I questioned if anything had occurred in class. He said no, Luca had shown no signs of stress or anxiety. I then asked if there was any reading in class. Ah ha! Yes, he would write a nursery rhyme on the board and each student would sing it individually. That was a fun way to assess the children. Yes, it would be fun for most second graders; however, Luca cannot read a nursery rhyme at age eight and a half.

Luca's teacher did not feel it necessary to tell any of the other teachers he comes into contact with that he has an IEP. The school's view is that in secondary school it is not necessary to communicate his disability with all of the teachers. I was told as parents we should introduce ourselves to his third grade teachers next fall and let them know of his challenges. Professional development days would allow all the teachers Luca may interact with accommodate a student with Dyslexia. They may even be able to identify a student. All it takes is one teacher.

Sincerely,

Nicole and Ignazio Bacile